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IV. INADEQUATE SCHOOLS

By EVERETT W. LORD,
Secretary for New England, National Child Labor Committee.

In referring to our schools as "inadequate," I do not wish to be understood as condemning them. The schools of this land have done a great work. They have provided the one great democratic institution which has enabled the nation to retain its democratic standards; they have molded the manhood and womanhood of America as could no other public institution; they have drawn together the heterogeneous elements poured from every side into this land and made of them a compact nation; yet few will deny that our schools have failed to sustain the entire burden which has been placed upon them. It may be that this burden is greater than should have been imposed; it may be very truly said that much of the responsibility now placed upon the schools properly belongs to the parents. Be that as it may, by common consent an immense task has been given to the schools to-day, and the schools, good as they are, have not proved entirely equal to it. We fully realize this when we find it true that one-third the young people who go to our schools fail to reach even the eighth grade, which ought to be the first milestone; that five millions out of sixteen millions enrolled drop out and disappear each year, we must recognize the fact that there is something wrong with the schools somewhere, some inadequate feature.

We have learned this morning a good deal about the subject of vocational direction. I believe our schools must undertake something more than the mere literary training they have been giving our children; that they must undertake something in the way of industrial training and vocational direction; perhaps that they shall undertake to prepare something like the standard laboring child, about which Mrs. Kelley has spoken to-night; not that the programs of the schools shall necessarily be standardized, but that they be recast and made to fit more exactly the standards of social and industrial life. The school of the present time is simply an outgrowth of

the school of the past, and remains distinctly a literary institution. The school of old was planned for children who had a great deal of manual work to do in the home; it gave them a little literary training which was what they most needed to round out their lives. These children needed no hand-training under the direction of a teacher, because their parents saw to it that their hands were trained in the many tasks of the home. Modern conditions have so changed that children are no longer employed in manual labor in their home, but still at school they get practically the same kind of training that the old school gave, though parents have of necessity ceased to train the child in any form of manual work. Few schools have undertaken to supply this need.

The old school was independent. The common school of today is part of a great educational system beginning with the kindergarten and extending on through the high school and the college to the university. The old independent school gave to its attendants the direct training they needed in their lives. Two or three years' attendance was about as much as the average boy could expect, but in that two or three years he would get the exact kind of training most needed to supplement his industrial life. The new schools, being part of a great system, give little thought to the immediate needs of the boys and girls who have only a few years for school attendance. Their attempt is to train for the upper grades and the higher schools of the system. But four out of a hundred of the children who attend our common schools go on through the entire system to the college or university; these four out of the hundred are the only ones who get the real value of our common schools. The ninety-six who would drop out on the way not only get less than the full value of the schools, but their needs are given almost no consideration. I maintain that it is for us to find some way to fit our schools to meet the needs of that vast majority who do not get the benefit of the entire system. I believe the problem of child labor is largely a school problem, just as every problem of childhood is a school problem, and when our schools shall reach out and give practical help to every child, not alone to four in a hundred, this problem of child labor will be largely solved. Until that time I feel very sure we are justified in classing the inadequate school of the present as one of the forces antagonistic to child-labor reform.